

A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Sometimes it is easier to talk about something than it is to do it. I look around me and I see that most of us have very little we care deeply about. Oh yes—we have people we love, but that isn't what I am writing about. Most of us just go our own way, living our own lives. We **mean** to do something about things that bother us, that we know deep inside are wrong, but somehow there is never time to spend checking out the solutions. Sometimes a performer you enjoy writes about something, perhaps the arms race, and you feel angry right along with him. Righteous anger...boy that sure feels good! But somehow you never get around to writing a letter to Mr. Reagan about it, or even your local representative. I'm no different from you. I do, however, vote. (Or at least I did in Canada...I can't here. But that's another topic entirely) When I lived in Canada I voted, and not just in the nationals, but **every** election. The point I am trying to make is—even with the apathy as rampant as we all know it is...get out and vote. Read about the issues first, and make some intelligent decisions. Actually, I would settle for simply an informed decision. Many states have various propositions coming up, find out about them before going to that polling station. It's so easy to let things we **could** care about get lost in the shuffle of day-to-day life. If you are thinking "yes, but how do I go about this?", put this comic down and pick up the telephone book. Look up your local "Registrar of Voters" for your city. They will tell you how to register, and once you are on their list you will be mailed newsletters from your State Senator and Assemblyman, along with general information about upcoming proposals. You can find out more from there. Maybe you CAN'T change the world overnight—but don't think your voice doesn't count. Every voice counts. Maybe by reading first about the choices—you will find you want to get more involved. Maybe. There IS more to life than books and movies, friends and parties. "They're pickin' up the prisoners and puttin' 'em in a pen, And all she wants to do is dance, dance!"

written by Danny Kortchmar
sung by Don Henly

Is this you?

Deni

Ms. TREE

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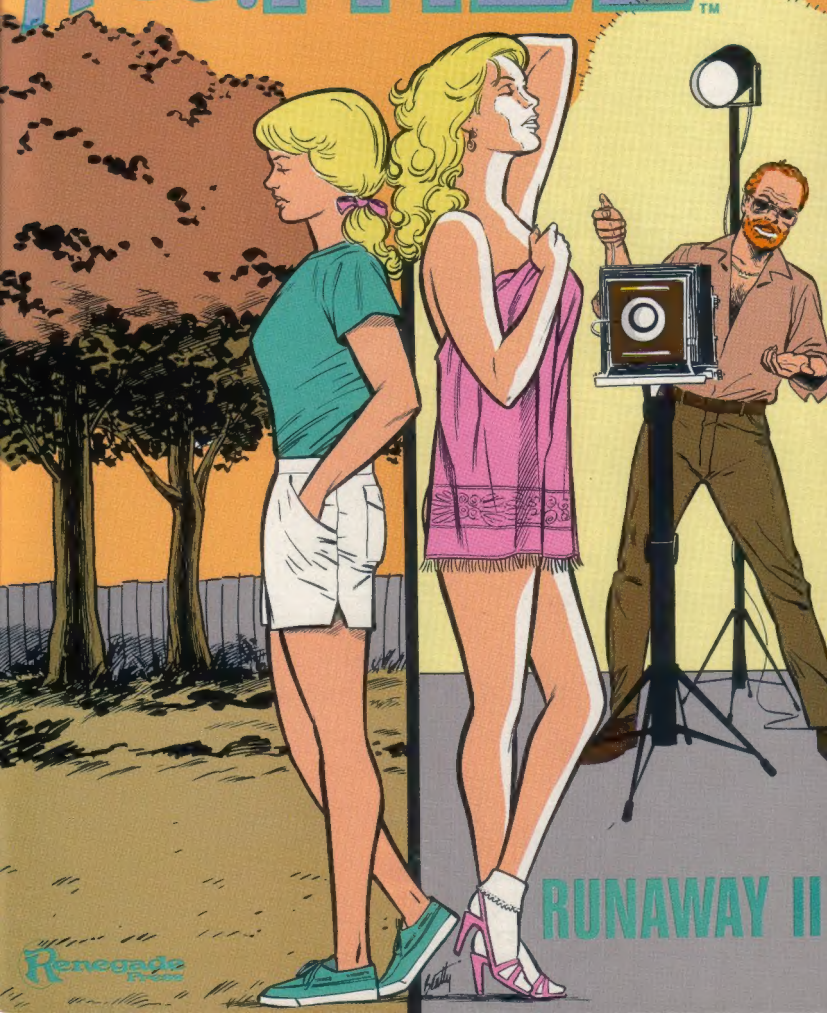
MAX COLLINS and
TERRY BEATTY'S

Ms.

TREE

32
SEP

200
IN U.S.
275
CANADA



RUNAWAY II

Renegade
Presents

Ms. TREE

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and Terry Beatty

"RUNAWAY II"

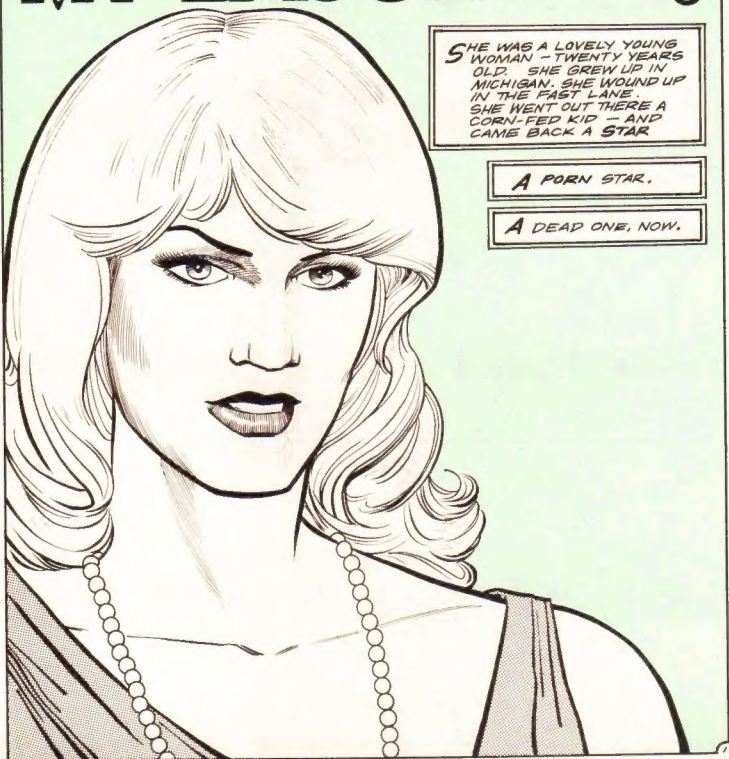
Chapter One

WHO *KILLED* MY DAUGHTER?

SHE WAS A LOVELY YOUNG WOMAN - TWENTY YEARS OLD. SHE GREW UP IN MICHIGAN. SHE WOUND UP IN THE FAST LANE. SHE WENT OUT THERE A CORN-FED KID - AND CAME BACK A STAR

A PORN STAR.

A DEAD ONE, NOW.



LETTERING & ART ASSIST: GARY KATO

THAT'S BETTY AT EIGHT -
SHE WAS A SWEET GIRL -
SHE REALLY WAS...



WE GAVE HER A GOOD
UPBRINGING, HER
MOTHER AND I DID.
FARMVILLE'S A LITTLE
PLACE - JUST THREE
THOUSAND-SOME FOLKS
... NO BAD INFLUENCES.



WHY DO YOU
THINK SHE
RAN AWAY?



I DON'T KNOW, MS. TREE, I REALLY DON'T.
BOREDOM, MAYBE. SHE ALWAYS SAID
SHE WANTED TO GO TO HOLLYWOOD
AND BE A **MOVIE STAR**. SHE WAS
PRETTY - HERE'S A PHOTO WHEN
SHE WAS SIXTEEN -



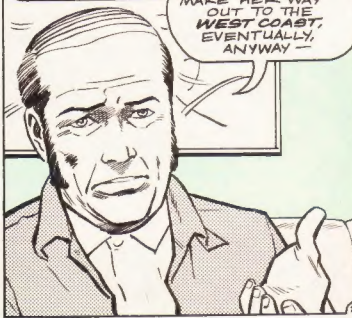
SHE WAS A LOVELY GIRL,
ALL RIGHT. HOW LONG
AFTER THIS WAS IT
THAT SHE LEFT?



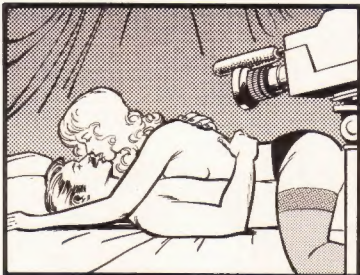
"NOT LONG - I WAS ABLE TO TRACK
HER TO THE LOCAL BUSSTATION -
SHE GOT A TICKET TO CHICAGO."



I CAME LOOKIN' FOR HER, BUT
FINALLY GAVE UP. I FIGURED SHE WAS
JUST PASSING THROUGH... WOULD
MAKE HER WAY
OUT TO THE
WEST COAST,
EVENTUALLY,
ANYWAY -



"SHE DID MAKE IT OUT THERE - AND TO NEW YORK, TOO. AND BACK HERE - SHE WORKED OUTA HERE MOST OFTEN... MAKING THESE TRIPLE-X FILMS, THEY CALL 'EM..."



THERE WAS A "PHOTO SPREAD," IT'S CALLED... MY LITTLE GIRL POSING WITHOUT ANY CLOTHES ON IN ALL SORTS OF OBSCENE PHOTOS - WITH TWO MEN. ONE OF THEM WAS COLORED...



"I WATCHED SOME OF ONE. SHE WAS STILL BEAUTIFUL, MY LITTLE BETTY - ONLY NOW SHE WAS CALLING HERSELF 'CINDI DUZIT.' AND THE THINGS SHE WAS DOING WEREN'T BEAUTIFUL AT ALL -"



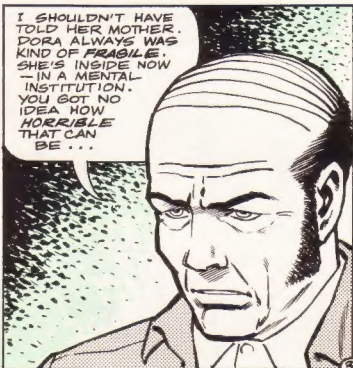
FIRST I KNEW OF THIS WAS LAST YEAR - SOME GUYS AT THE FEED STORE, WHICH I OWN AND PRETTY MUCH MANAGE, BROUGHT ME A KING LEER MAGAZINE.



"IN THE MAGAZINE, THEY HAD REVIEWS OF SOME OF HER 'MOVIES' AND 'VIDEOS' - YOU COULD SEND FOR TAPES OF SOME OF THEM. I DID."



I SHOULDN'T HAVE TOLD HER MOTHER. DORA ALWAYS WAS KIND OF FRAGILE. SHE'S INSIDE NOW - IN A MENTAL INSTITUTION. YOU GOT NO IDEA HOW HORRIBLE THAT CAN BE...



DID YOU MAKE ANY EFFORT TO CONTACT HER?



NOT AT FIRST. I'M NOT EXACTLY RELIGIOUS, MS. TREE - BUT I AM GODFEARING...



"AND THE THINGS MY BABY WAS DOING FOR MONEY WERE THE DEVIL'S WORK--"

DESPERATELY
SEEKING
Cindi



STARRING
CINDI
DUZIT

BUT THEN,
LAST CHRISTMAS,
SHE CALLED -



"SHE SAID SHE WAS SORRY SHE'D EMBARRASSED US BY THE ROAD SHE WENT DOWN - SHE ASKED TO TALK TO HER MOM -"



THEN I TOLD WHERE HER MOM WAS, AND SHE KINDA SOBBED AND HUNG UP.

DID YOU EVER HEAR FROM HER AGAIN?



NO, SHE WAS KILLED NEW YEAR'S EVE. THEY SHOT HER IN THE HEAD -

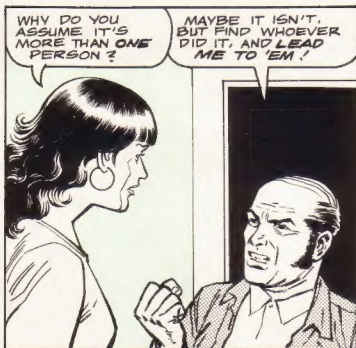


MY UNDERSTANDING WAS THE OFFICIAL VERDICT WAS SUICIDE.



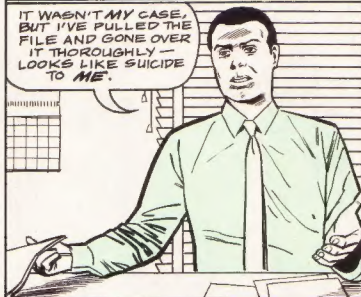
"NO! IT WAS THEM PORNOGRAPHERS AND DOPE PUSHERS SHE WAS IN WITH! THEY KILLED HER!"





FIRST THINGS FIRST: I WENT TO SEE THE "BEST HOMICIDE DETECTIVE IN TOWN" —

IT WASN'T MY CASE, BUT I'VE PULLED THE FILE AND GONE OVER IT THOROUGHLY — LOOKS LIKE SUICIDE TO ME.



A .38 SMITH AND WESSON — NOT A WOMAN'S WEAPON.

NEITHER IS A STERLING NINE MILLIMETER — AND YOU'VE GOT ONE IN YOUR PURSE.



SHE HAD COCAINE IN HER BLOODSTREAM?

YES — NO OVERDOSE, THOUGH —



SHE WAS A PRETTY HEAVY USER, APPARENTLY — HER BOY FRIEND WAS ... STILL IS ... A DEALER, THOUGH HE'S NEVER BEEN NAILED FOR IT IN A MAJOR WAY.

CAN YOU GIVE ME THIS CHARMER'S NAME?



"I CAN GIVE YOU A LOT OF NAMES — STARTING WITH ONE YOU ALREADY KNOW —"

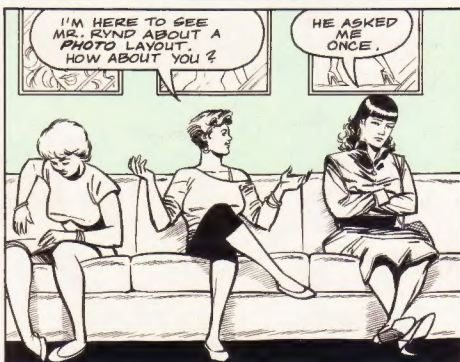
KING LEER
PUBLICATIONS, INC.
HARRY RYND
PRESIDENT



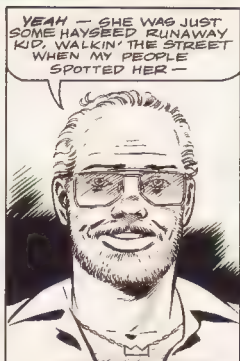
TELL HARRY RYND THAT MICHAEL TREE IS HERE TO SEE HIM.

DO YOU HAVE AN APPOINTMENT?

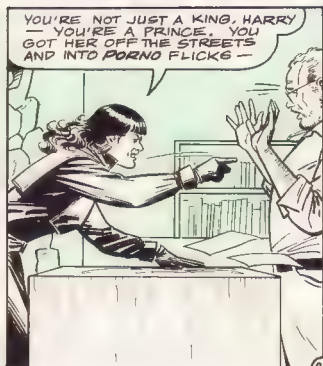








"I RESENT THAT CRACK LADY! SHE WAS OF AGE - FREE, WHITE AND 18. HELL, SHE WAS HOOKIN' WHEN I PULLED HER IN!"



"I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THAT!
I JUST PUT HER IN MY MAG — I'M
NOT INTO PRODUCING PORN FLICKS.
THE LAW AROUND HERE'S TOO
HARDLINE FOR THAT —"



CONTINUED THIS ISSUE



Address all letters of comment to:

SWAK
P O BOX 1007
MUSCATINE, IA
52761

Dear Mike, Terry, and Company.

If **Ms. Tree** were like any other comic book there would have been a big ugly, "blurb" on the cover of issue #26 that said **REVEALED AT LAST!!! THE SECRET ORIGIN OF MS TREE!!!! THIS IS AN ISSUE DESTINED TO BECOME A COLLECTORS ITEM!!!!**

But then if **Ms. Tree** were like "any other comic book" it probably wouldn't appeal to me in the first place.

"Heroine Withdrawal" helped explain more than **Ms. Tree's** early life. It helped explain how **Ms. Tree** is staying out of trouble (and I still refuse to believe the people who ran the corrupt prison allowed her to leave there alive -- much less allowed the story to hit the newspapers) and helped to pull her out of a situation that would lead to her ultimately being jailed for life. It somehow seems easier to believe that Michael Tree will be able to work her way out of a mental institution than a prison with all hands against her (and where she would have been a "sitting duck" target for the mobs informants and assassins who were already in the slammer).

I think the thing that will be most important in getting **Ms. Tree** out of her present difficulties, however, will be the rise of **Ms. Tree** as a "media heroine." The mob will be afraid to move against her directly if she's highly visible. In most comics some flimsy excuse for her being acquitted or the whole storyline just being **dropped** would seem part of the natural swing of events. But in this book, since it is so firmly anchored to being as "real" and "believable" as possible, it will take lots of hard work to resolve the current plotline. Personally, I can't wait to see how it all works out.

They say that imitation is the sincerest form of theft. In the early issues of **Ms. Tree** you casually mentioned there was some problem finding a publisher for **Ms. Tree**. Now that it is becoming more popular I see that one of your 'big two' competitors has launched their own hard-boiled female detective series called "Carolina South" or some such nonsense. It seems that the fabled "house of ideas" is still plugging away, as long as they have someone else's ideas.

Doesn't that just make you so mad you could bite the head off a bull?

T E Pouncey WICHITA, KS

In response to the final matter you bring up, T E, I can only refer you to our widely-run "Substance" ad

Dear Max and Terry,

Ms. Tree #26 was another very enjoyable issue. I hope Michael gets something good out of her stay at "Restview Psychiatric Hospital." I really do think she needs help to overcome her obsessive behavior. But I also realize that the book would probably be pretty boring if she acted like a "normal" person (whatever that is).

The coloring of this issue was kind of strange, and I've yet to decide if I like it or not. But I do hope Terry continues to experiment with the duotone process.

I really don't mean to make **SWAK** a soapbox for gay rights, but I feel compelled to respond to those letters by Brian Daly and David Malcolm Porta. First, as Mr. Daly saw, I signed my real name to my letter. It's just too bad **Max** doesn't include full addresses in the letter column, not only so Mr. Daly could see I have nothing to hide, but also so I could write Mr. Daly personally. I won't even comment on his lumping of terrorists, re-born Christians and homosexuals, except to say that I have much more on my mind than just pushing my beliefs down every one's throat. For example, looking back on **SWAK** I saw that I've had four letters printed -- the first three of which have absolutely nothing to do with gay rights or anything like that.

I'd also like to correct Mr. Daly's comment about the letter in

Jon Sable. The letter appeared in issue #32, and it was signed A Friend of **Grey**. Grey as in the gay supporting character in the book named **Grey**.

About Mr. Porta's letter: give me a break! I knew I was gay long before I'd ever had sex. And though I realize some young boys are seduced by older men (though I'm sure far more young girls are seduced by older men), neither I nor anyone I know of was "corrupted by an older man into living this life." It's awful misconceptions like this that make me think we really haven't gotten anywhere.

That having been said I'd like to add that **SWAK** is the most lively and entertaining letter column I know of.

Fred Averick, BROOKLYN, NY

*Thanks for your comment on our "lively" letters page. We've been getting rave reviews even from R A Jones who as you may recall was at the center of a storm of controversy in **SWAK** after a review of his in **AMAZING HEROES** suggested certain types of comic book stories (including the likes of **MS. TREE**) were better off being done on TV. I think it's rather gracious of Mr. Jones to acknowledge us in this way (in his TBG column) even though he still admits to being lukewarm to the comic itself. I would suggest to Mr. Jones that it is damn near impossible for a bad comic book to have a great letter column. The suggestion that it is my handling of the letter column itself that generates mail - as opposed to the stories themselves and the issues raised therein - doesn't really wash. "Runaway," in issues #16 - #17 is still generating mail. Speaking of which, we've gotten backed up on mail - a ton of **SWAK** has come in, much of it regarding "The Other Cheek" but the lack of a **SWAK** in the Summer Special has put us behind. We'll do 4-page columns till we catch up. In the meantime, keep writing us - though we do request that you keep the discussions of philosophical matters and social problems to a minimum (gay rights and abortion, for example, are tied to continuities that are well behind us now). Letters that discuss the book itself will get priority (as will typed letters). natch*

Dear Max and Terry

Michael Zmuda's letter in #26 raised the question of whether **Ms. Tree** relies on her gun to get out of tight spots too often, and says she "could depend more on her brain."

It seems to me that most of these tight spots have not offered her a wide range of options. She could have allowed the hit man in "One Grave for My Tears" to escape instead of shooting him in the back, she could have arrested Patrick Rushing instead of deliberately letting him take the gun from her in #3, and she could have handed Billy Bob (in #17) and Muerta (in #21) over to the cops, instead of executing them. In all other cases, her only real choice was kill or be killed. In some instances it was her own impulsiveness or bad judgment that got her into these situations in the first place (she should have called the cops instead of staging her own commando raids) but once she got into them, shooting was necessary. A gun in these cases was not "the easy way out," it was the only way out. If she is at fault, it is for the way she gets herself into trouble, not the way she gets out of it.

I did not get the impression from Robert Sodaro's letter in #21 that he can't "differentiate violence in comics from real life." The tone of that letter may have been emotional, but no more so than those that disapproved of **Ms. Tree's** vigilantism. Many of those accused you of condoning murder, or accused **Ms. Tree** of wanting to kill "all harmful members of society," or all mentally ill persons.

The printing problems with #25 must have been solved as #26 had the best color registration yet. I don't really have a strong preference between duotone, full color, and B & W, but

if color causes too many problems, straight B & W is better than sloppy color

LAPD badge 714, eh? How did you resist having Dr Syke say, during his interview with Michael, "Just the facts, Ma'am"?

Tom Crunkleton, ATLANTA, GA

Dear Artists and Editor,

I have enjoyed reading **Ms. Tree** every month since its creation and subsequent publication. Your magazine contains good art (written and drawn). Some issues also contain letters which provide new ideas to think about. Sometimes, however, **some** people are misinformed and also just plain stupid (is my anger showing?). Perhaps, I should have addressed this letter to David Malcolm Porta, instead of generalizing the above statement to **some** people.

First off, Mr. Porta, I am informing you I am a soon-to-be medical social worker presently in graduate school. (I already have a B.A. in psychology.) I will try to reserve comment on your friend's social worker's pitiful attempt at generalizing the behavior of all gay people because of the actions of some irresponsible gay folks.

You know (or do you?) the nature of the behavioral sciences makes it impossible to predict the future behaviors of all people, let alone defined groups of people or even individuals. People are just too complex and unpredictable. At best, after extensive research, a social science researcher may gain a statistical probability, not an absolute fact with an absolute predictive value. But, I can predict if I did hear Porta's friend's social worker make such a statement, I would be tempted to kick his brain. Anyway, I'd probably think about doing something to him.

By the way, to set the record straight, I am straight. I happen to do field work with AIDS patients. As a consequence, I usually interact professionally and personally with many (about 20) gay people (or street homosexuals, if you prefer) every month. When I first started working with AIDS patients, I felt uncomfortable (fear of the unknown?). However, at times I still feel uncomfortable. But, only when I remind myself to feel uncomfortable. At other times, I am amazed at the insights which certain gay people have into human and inhuman nature. These insights often dwarf my professional knowledge of human behavior. My interactions with gay people and with the terminally ill have helped me learn more than what I have learned from my research, my texts or my professors.

Secondly, Mr. Porta, as a fellow Californian, contrary to what you imply in your letter, private gay sexual behavior between consenting adults is legal in California. Further, male-female sexual behavior with consenting minors is still illegal in California. It is easy to label sex with minors as irresponsible.

In closing, I would like to publicly challenge this unnamed social worker (which Mr. Porta claims to be associated with) to provide a concrete reference to his "finding."

Cal Hackleton, SAN DIEGO, CA

Dear Max and Terry,

I was rather surprised to see "Roger's Story" in #26, right in the middle of the **Ms. Tree**-in-the-loony-bin sequence but in retrospect it makes good sense to me. (Aren't you relieved, Max? Now you have The Official Maple Seal of Approval for this decision! A dedicated mystery writer breathes easier now, I know.) By shifting the focus from Michael, you prolong in our minds her stay in the institution without having to cook up another adventure to take place within those walls. Also, the news that "nothing happened" to her this month is in line with the tedious nature of her stay there. I mean, what's the purpose of locking her up if she gets to fight on the inside too? (Just kidding! Sort of.)

Roger has always seemed to me to be pretty much of a nothing character (and I speak as a veteran of **over ten** issues now!). His main purpose seems to be to "be there" for **Ms. Tree** as a part of the institution. She runs an agency, so there has to be someone in it, so he's it. But, of course, even supposedly-"nothing" characters (in fiction, as in real life) can and do have their own personalities, backgrounds, etc. and sometimes they're even interesting. And of course, since Roger's a detec-

tive he has a "fallen woman" in his past. It was so nice to meet her. The story went pretty much as expected, with Roger behaving honourably (pretty much) and Vicki being the semi-shady lady who really-does-love-him-deep-down-gosh-darn-it. However, the ending took me by surprise and was a nicely dramatic and ironic twist. There was an aura of real tragedy there, however, it was not as great as it might have been since we had already seen that Roger and Vicki could never really "be together" again.

And hey, I must protest the easy nature of the Mike Mist feature this time! I mean, I **saw** the situation developing. I **anticipat**ed the question, I had an **answer** right away, and I was **right**! This has **got** to mean that you failed to achieve some minimum level of difficulty! Were you being nice to us no-talent armchair detectives, Max? (Or maybe I was just inspired to brilliance by the presence of **Ms. Tree** this time!)

T M Maple, WESTON, ONT

*As for the relative ease or difficulty of a given **Mike Mist**, I can only say that after having written in excess of 75 minute mysteries, I strive only to come up with another one—any other one. Ease or difficulty, at this point, are not factors. In fact, I have gotten so burnt out on devising **Mist** solutions that of late my wife Barb - managing editor of this publication, after all - has been coming up with the basic premise (i.e., problem and solution) of the last few minute mysteries. I think she's doing a great job, although her "bank teller machine" mystery of a few issues ago has attracted some dissenting mail (as you'll see in a future **SWAK**).*

Dear Max,

I must admit, although we've seen many exciting scenes and read of many exciting adventures in the last 28 issues, issue 28 itself stands out as one of my all time favorites. The reason why is probably due to the absence of Michael. Don't get me wrong, **Ms. Tree** is one of my favorite characters. It's just that for the first time, we really got to see one of the other characters. Sure, they're always around the office and they drive around with Michael a lot, but they never really do anything important.

I was very pleased with "Roger's Story." I always thought of him as a good character, but was a little upset that, as I said before, he never really did anything. It was interesting to see his inner conflicts and have them explained. There is obviously a lot more to him than initially met the eye. The only problem I had with issue 28 was the super speed it moved at. First, Roger is having 'Nam flashbacks, and then, all of a sudden, a girl who he hasn't seen in ten years pops up. I would have liked to have seen his story run about two issues or so. Regardless, the story was great, and I hope to see more Roger. Freemont solo stories in the future (I'd also like to see solo stories of Bryan Hand, Dan Green, or even Effie, well maybe not Effie).

Thank you for taking the time to listen. Before I go, I've just one question. How come you decided to come out with a **Ms. Tree** Summer Special #1, instead of a **Ms. Tree** 3-D #2?

Chris Romano, PACIFIC PALISADES, CA

*We did our Summer Special as a change of pace, also we thought the 3-D had would fizzle again. It doesn't seem to have - meaning next summer a **Ms. Tree** 3-D #2 is a possibility. Right, Ray Zone? As for doing stories centered upon the other characters, that's in the overall scheme of things - although Dan seems to get plenty of on-camera time as it is. The entire structure of "The Other Cheek," with its shifting points of view, was designed to give our secondary cast members some special attention.*

Dear Deni, Max, Terry & Gary,

I've just read **Ms. Tree** #27 & 28, which are an inappropriate couple of issues to comment on together as they deal with different stories, but it would be silly to write two separate letters so I'm afraid that you're getting both sets of comments together. Hope you don't mind!

The continuation of "Heroine Withdrawal" was an interesting further look behind the usually locked doors of the

psychiatric hospital but I thought you didn't make enough of your opportunity to look into this realm more closely. Too much of the story was centered round Ms. Tree's detective work, and could have been set anywhere else just as easily. Not that I didn't enjoy it, I did, thoroughly. And I take the point that Ms. Tree's lifestyle will attract mysteries to her wherever she goes. As the doctor says, paranoia is (or at least can be) a self-fulfilling prophecy. It reminds me of the line, "Just because you're paranoid, it doesn't mean they aren't out to get you!" But I thought you could have expanded upon the very revealing and pertinent conversation the psychiatrist and Michael had on the last page of chapter three. I understand that in a couple of months' time, Michael will forsake the use of guns (if only for a while and only until she sees some unwelcome consequences of this policy change, I suspect), so I guess that will be the outcome of her stay in the, er, laughing centre. But I hope we're let in on more of the psychotherapy. And just what medical treatment has she agreed to submit to? I can't think of any drugs that would be appropriate, apart from something to help her sleep without being disturbed by the bad dreams. Have either of you been into a psychiatric hospital, by the way? Claude may seem stereotyped, but there really are plenty like him around. Anyway, even if you're not going to be drawn into the pros and cons of these institutions, I hope we can see more of Ms. Tree's psychology come out in the open. Unless you think that would be revealing too much!

Meanwhile "Roger's Story" was a nice interlude. It's a pity it couldn't have a happier ending - I hope Claude doesn't also meet the violent fate so many of the book's support seem to. Where did the Vietnam flashback fit in? And who is the real Sam Meyers? I see Muerta and the mob are going to be behind almost everything, which I guess makes sense in the context of what has gone on before. It would seem likely, though, that if the Mob really wants Ms. Tree dead, they'd be able to arrange it without too much trouble, for all her skills and bravery.

As for the other bits of the comic, I agree with your columnist who signs the praises of Denis' Note from the Publisher, "it's the best communication between editor and reader in the business. You also have the most fascinating letters page in comics, even including *Swamp Thing*." I also enjoy the Mike Mist mysteries, and I'm on the side of those who think Terry's doing great covers. The jailhouse scene covers were the best since issue 10 and the cover of 28 was brilliantly moody, although it could have done without the big orange box with the title. Lettering the size of the creators' names would have sufficed. But here I am, nit-picking in a comic that's certainly in my top ten. I hope you don't start moving over to more "comic-booky" covers, and certainly not comic-booky stories, which I enjoy but have enough of elsewhere. I read Ms. Tree for something different. There again, if you'd increase sales a lot by changing the covers, I wouldn't blame you for trying for a little more money. But you might get a lot of people picking it up who'd be disappointed by what they found inside. I do think the covers are indeed sometimes worth the price of the book, but I wouldn't begrudge you a wage increase.

Finally, any chance of any or all of you coming over for our big London convention in September? We see very little of the American creative staff over here, and would love to have you. Dave Sim was a great success last year, I'm sure you'd be just as welcome.

I'm sure you get hundreds of requests for this sort of thing, but is there **any** chance of a sketch of Ms. Tree & Co., or a photocopied script or something? It seems highly unlikely I'll get the chance to meet you and ask in person, so as I love having original artwork and sketches on my wall, I thought I'd ask - the worse you can do is say no, and I wouldn't be offended!

Malcolm Bourne London England

gists (My novel Quarry's Deal also explores this subject and setting.) As for visiting London, short of all-expenses-paid trips, Terry and I simply can't afford it. Of course, if each of our 15,000 readers would just send along a quarter a piece

Max, Terry, Gary,

What's the big idea? Didn't you know that the star of **Ms. Tree** is Ms. Tree? How dare you build an entire issue of this book around a supporting character? and **Roger Freemont**, yet! He's hardly dynamic or exciting, and doesn't even have a full head of hair. How many bald or balding protagonists have you ever seen in comics, huh? How dare you break coveted comic book traditions like that! A Roger Freemont solo story, all I can say is. It's about time!

"Roger's Story," in **Ms. Tree** #28, was definitely a long-overdue spotlight, a welcome bit of attention for the most consistent and overlooked member of this series' cast. Roger is by far the most realistic and believable character in Ms. Tree's world, the only one I would feel likely to run into out in the street. I'm not saying that the others aren't believable, but face it -- there are more Rogers out there than there are galsy women, private eyes, or murderous, evil gangsters. Rogers are everywhere, if you look around, they're not dashing, or brawny, or noisy or selfish or macho. They're just average guys, trying to make a living, trying to be honest and stand up for what they believe in. They aren't the balloon-muscled supermen in comics or TV, or even the tough, rock-jawed P.I.s in detective films and books. But they are dependable, and brave in a clinch, and they make up the backbone of our urgent mundane lives. It was nice to see an Everyman as the hero of a comic for a change.

That's what Roger is, too -- an Everyman. He represents what is best in the average person: he's smart, honest, hard-working, and devoted to his friends. Even when he was twisted around and turned on by his ex-girlfriend's reappearance, he kept a clear head, remembered his priorities and his promise to protect Mike Jr. When he had to protect himself, he did, with the same resourcefulness and fearlessness he credited to Ms. Tree. Roger is a great guy, and he really deserved the solo story in **Ms. Tree** 28. I hope you keep him around in the series for a long time, as a practical, grounding, steady force in the wild and frightening world of Michael. He's an anchor for your heroine in the same sort of way that the butler Alfred is an anchor for another great detective -- Batman.

Anyway, the story you plugged Freemont into was a nice piece of work, a tight, revealing vignette which provided a welcome break after the trial, prison, and asylum ordeal of the past couple issues. It was just right, a drama with no fat on it and just the right mix of characterization and action. The return of Roger's ex-Vicki was a nice device to trigger a story which focused on him, her request for Mike Jr. added conflict which allowed some heretofore dormant qualities to possess Roger. The two thugs threw in enough suspense to keep things interesting, and to spark the climactic scene.

You showed us a lot about Ms. Tree's operative in this story, enough to deepen the character beyond his brave but bland portrayal so far. The Vietnam flashback showed there is more to his relationship with Dan Green than I had suspected, the appearance of a love interest showed he is not a complete social recluse, his refusal to sell out Ms. Tree revealed his dedication to his boss, his fight with the thugs showed his quick thinking and guts, and the shooting of Vicki showed that Roger is suspicious and determined to survive, even if he has to hurt someone he feels strongly about. All in all, you showed that Roger is the type of guy that anyone would want behind them when fighting creeps like Muerta - not a flashy, arrogant, careless loser, but a caring and perceptive professional. Let's see more of the new and improved Freemont!

Highlights this issue (besides the entire story) include the blue duotone, a sharp and unique art twist which sets your book a step above straight black-and-white, the all-blue flashback, which was set off well from the main flow of the story, the all-blue Mike Mist, and the great shot on page 7 of the second panel, where Roger appears in the doorway to face the hoods. My only complaint: why did Roger make love with Vicki if he was upset after all she had done to him? Vicki betrayed and left him ten years ago, and Roger suspected she had been working as an inside girl for her "Heist artist" brother. He suspected she had been in on the Purulator job, and he knew that she had only come in him because she wanted something. If he knew she was a bum, and was trying to use him, why did Roger get it on with her? Was he just desperate after "ten long, lonely

Request for sketches must be declined due to time, but Terry's original pages are available. I think the Vietnam flashback is self-explanatory. It's strictly background info on Roger, with hints of future storylines planted as well. The real Sam Meyers is (as I've mentioned before) my friend Lynn "Sam" Myers, a radio broadcaster and budding writer (he lives near Three Mile Island, so I assume he glows in the dark). Yes, I have spent quite a bit of time in psyche hospitals - not as a patient, as some of my critics might think, but two relatives, and one of my closest friends (who is also a close friend of Terry's), had severe mental problems that took them to the University of Iowa's psyche hospital, upon which we patterned Restview. I have sat through several commitment hearings and have dealt at some length with psychiatrists and psycholo-

years "Was he genuinely having second thoughts about her? Was he confused? Or was he perhaps using her leading her on and making her think it was all okay, only to reject her the way she had rejected him? What motivation did you intend in this case?"

Nice job all around, everybody, and I'm anxious for next issue. Oh, and that cover was **fabulous!** You didn't use any black ink on it at all, and it came out very pastel and different. It really caught my eye, and I hope you try it again. What is this technique called? (Probably "no black-ink," huh?) Keep it up, guys!

Robert T. Jeschonek, JOHNSTOWN, PA

Thanks for your very thoughtful letter, Robert, but as you've seen, the post-"Roger's Story" Roger is hardly "new and improved" - emaciated and haunted is more like it. How he develops from here on depends upon where the story takes him (and the rest of us). Your questions about Roger's motives where Vicki was concerned can be simply answered: he loved her. Love, after all, is blind - and Roger does wear glasses.

Dear Max,

A few random abstract thoughts on **Ms. Tree**.

Issue 28 of **Ms. Tree** was fantastic! The plot twist on the last page really made the story. The focus on Roger fit perfectly into the continuing storyline. You couldn't keep having things happen to Ms. Tree in the hospital or they would never let her out. Terry's layout of the story was brilliant. Particularly good was the layout of the hitman getting up on page 9 of the second chapter. It warned us something was going to happen, but we had to wait six more panels to see what.

A successful "special effect" in this issue was the printing of Roger's Vietnam flashback entirely in blue. It effectively set apart the flashback from the rest of the story. The color toning of the rest of the story was very well done, as usual, but I think it is time to start experimenting with some new colors. How about green? It doesn't sound easy, but it might be interesting.

The **Ms. Tree** series has been very successful in holding my interest. Usually after about the first 20 issues of a comic I am bored with it and quit buying it. Not with **Ms. Tree**. I'm still looking forward to each issue as much, if not more, than the last. I feel the quality of the writing is unmatched in comics. The ground breaking topics of your stories have made you the talk of the comic industry - see **Lois Lane** #1 for a example.

One thing that I believe can be improved is Ms. Tree's appearance. She especially her face, appears to be becoming less and less feminine. Her nose has become more pronounced and her chin more square. I know you're not doing "good girl" art, but just because Ms. Tree is tough doesn't mean she has to look like a man. Look back at some old issues and see what you think.

I caught the announcement in **Comic Buyer's Guide** #652 that the quality of the paper used in **Ms. Tree** is to be improved. I like the idea even though it will cost 30¢ more a month. The quality of the story and art demands the best printing possible. The type of audience that reads **Ms. Tree** shouldn't be affected by a small price increase. I think the change is a good idea for all those involved.

Terry's **Phoney Pages** were really funny. It would make an interesting series. Please pass my view on to him.

Michael Marcz

I agree that Terry's PHONY PAGES collections are great - he's had a lot of favorable mail and rave comments at the conventions this summer. As for Ms. Tree's appearance, that is affected by her state of mind, many readers have noticed how pretty she is in The Other Cheek - when she's placid and pleasant.

Dear Mr. Collins,

My apologies for sending this to you through SWAK, as this letter doesn't really deal with the series. I do (obviously) read and enjoy **Ms. Tree**, but only started following the series a few issues ago.

As Samuel R. Delaney has one of his characters say in **Dhalgren**, there's really not that much a reader can say to an

author without embarrassing both except, "Your books have given me a great deal of pleasure and I look forward to reading the next one." That sentiment holds true for me. And that's partially the reason I'm writing.

I understand you authored a critical study/biography of Jim Thompson (entitled, I believe, **The Killers Inside Him**) and a similar book about Mickey Spillane. I've been searching for both books without any luck, and was hoping you might be able to give me some information about them.

I read with some amusement your afterword in **Quarry**, about sending copies of that book to your readers after it had gone out of print. Although I hope it won't come to that, if you **do** happen to have extra copies of the Thompson and Spillane books and would be willing to send them to me, I'd be very grateful. I'd be happy to first send you a check covering the costs for the book(s) and the postage. Preferably (especially for you, I guess) you might be able to give me the publisher's information about the books, whether they're still in print and where I might be able to order them.

I hope you'll find the time to answer this letter. In the meantime, I'll be keeping myself occupied with **A Shroud for Aquarius** (the latest book of yours I've been able to find) and waiting with anticipation for my copy of **The Million-Dollar Wound** to arrive from the bookstore.

Fred Bais, MERRIMACK, NH

*Thanks for the kind words. I'm glad readers of my books are finding their way to **MS. TREE** (just as some **MS. TREE** readers are finding their way to my books). Current novels of mine can always be purchased through Robert Weinberg, who advertises in these pages regularly, but he doesn't keep everything of mine that is in print in constant stock -- though most any bookstore ought to be able to order anything that's in print (which is just about everything except the six **NOLAN** novels). I've had many letters (from overseas frequently) about the Thompson book, **The Killers Inside Him**, which Ed Gorman and I did together in 1983 (it has a Terry Beatty cover). Only 425 copies were published and I only have one copy myself, at this point. The interest in Thompson has been fueled by the Black Lizard reprints, and also by Frank Miller and Howard Chaykin, who have discovered Thompson's books and are mentioning him frequently in interviews. (Johnny-come-lately's all! I've been reading Thompson since 1964 and Terry discovered him around '73, *The Spillane* study is still in print. Write Bowling Green State University Popular Press, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403 for info.*

Coming Soon The Files of Ms. Tree Volume 3 The Mike Mist Casebook



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THE MIKE MIST

MINUTE MIST-ERIES

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"TAG! YOU'RE IT."

HARRY, YOU SEE, HAD CANCER. HE KNEW IT. EVI KNEW IT. AND HE WANTED SOME FUN IN HIS FINAL DAYS...



ONLY HARRY'S CANCER WENT INTO REMISSION — PROGNOSIS WAS VERY GOOD...



MRS. HAMPTON'S CAB IS JUST ARRIVING FROM THE AIRPORT, LT.

THANKS.

LET'S GREET HER...



LET ME GET THOSE, EVI —

WHY, MIKE — YOU'RE TOO GOOD TO ME —



PENCILS & LETTERING: GARY KATO

FIVE YEARS AGO, MILLIONAIRE
HARRY HAMPTON —
 HAMPTONITE LUGGAGE HEIR —
 MARRIED SOUTH AMERICAN
 "MODEL" **EVI TISIUQCA**...



I TRIED TO TALK HARRY OUT
 OF IT AT THE TIME —

LET ME CHECK
 HER OUT FIRST —

MIKE, SHE'S
BEAUTIFUL,
 AND I'M
DYING —



AND HE FINALLY HIRED
 YOU TO GET THE GOODS
 ON EVI —

YEAH — ONLY
 IT LOOKS
 LIKE I
 DIDN'T GET 'EM
FAST ENOUGH —



EVIS OUT OF TOWN,
 MIKE — SHE'S BEEN
 VISITING HER MOM
 IN SOUTHERN
 CALIFORNIA FOR
 SEVERAL DAYS —



I'M AFRAID I HAVE
BAD NEWS,
 MRS. HAMPTON —

YES?



YEAH — YOUR LITTLE TRICK DIDN'T
 WORK... MAYBE **SOMEBODY** TOOK
 THE PLANE FOR YOU, BUT YOU
 HAVEN'T BEEN **ANYWHERE**... EXCEPT
 MAYBE A MOTEL YOU BEEN HIDING
 OUT IN, BEFORE AND AFTER KILLING
 HARRY.



IF EVI HAD JUST ARRIVED FROM THE
 AIRPORT, WHY DIDN'T HER BAGS
 BEAR BAGGAGE CLAIM TAGS?

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Ms. TREE

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and Terry Beatty

"RUNAWAY II"

Chapter Two

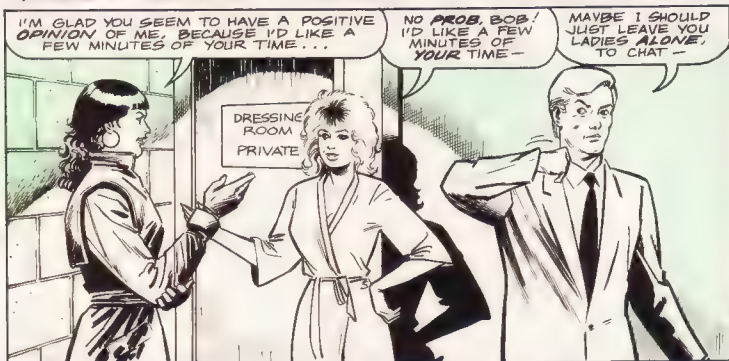
GOLDEN RULE

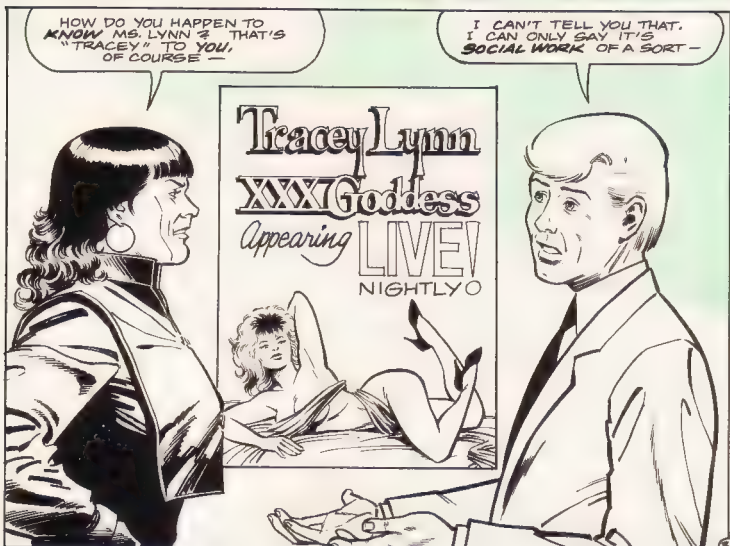
I HADN'T SEEN GLENN HARWOOD IN ALMOST A YEAR, WHEN I'D PURSUED MY RUNAWAY STEPSON TO THE SMALL SOUTHERN CITY WHERE EX-COP GLENN WAS A SOCIAL WORKER. GLENN AND I HAD GOTTEN... WELL, FRIENDLY - TILL OUR OUTLOOKS GOT IN THE WAY.

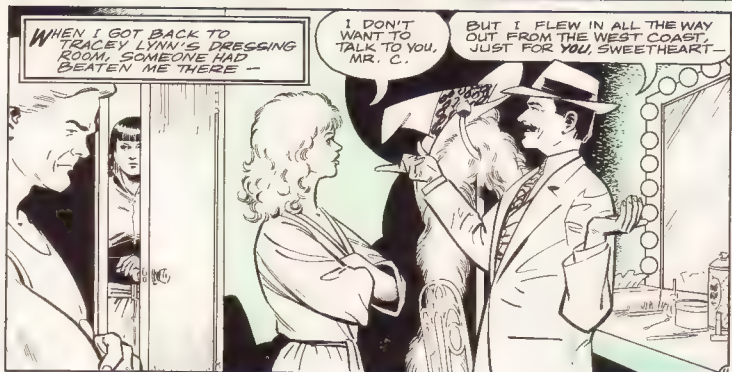
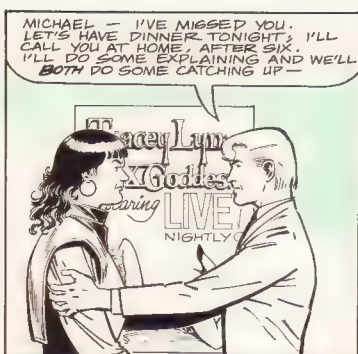
WHAT AM I DOING HERE? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE !?!

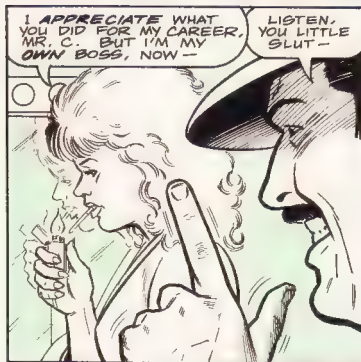
I ASKED YOU FIRST.

DRESSING ROOM PRIVATE

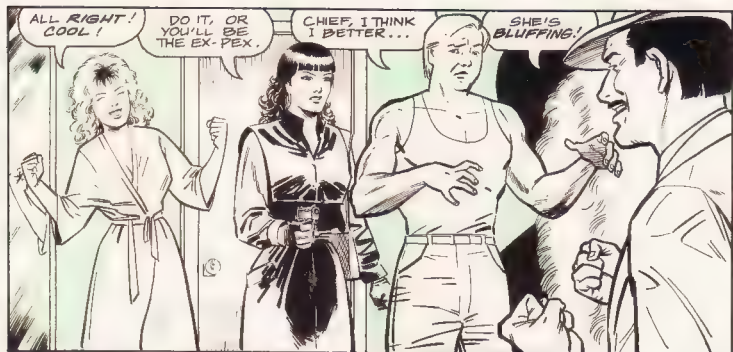


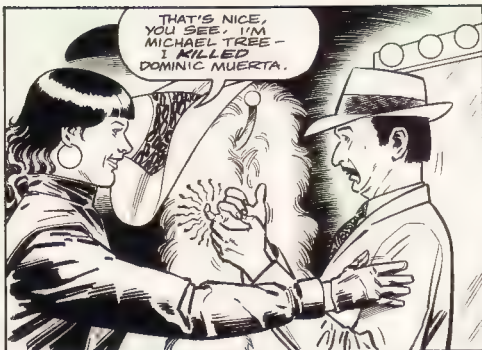












I'M STARTING MY OWN COMPANY —
PRODUCING MY OWN VIDEOS AND FILMS.
IF ALL GOES WELL, I'LL BE OUT OF
THIS RACKET IN TWO YEARS.



THAT'S WHY I WANT TO HIRE YOU —
TO PROTECT ME FROM MR. C. AND
HIS GOONS !



NOW, THEY'RE JUST
TRYING TO SCARE ME
INTO SIGNING A NEW
EXCLUSIVE CONTRACT
WITH CXTV, AND
SCARE MY MONEY
ANGELS OFF.



YOU FIGURE ONCE YOUR NEW
COMPANY'S UP AND RUNNING,
THEY'LL BACK OFF —



LET ME ASK YOU SOMETHING —
YOU KNEW CINDI DUZIT
PRETTY WELL, DIDN'T YOU ?

SURE, WE DID
SOME FILMS
TOGETHER.



"SHE'S WHY I'M HERE,
MS. LYNN. I DIDN'T HAVE
A PSYCHIC FLASH TO COME
ADDITION TO BE YOUR
BODYGUARD —"

DESPERATELY
SEEKING
Cindi

XXX
THRILLS!
ADULTS
ONLY



STARRING
CINDI
DUZIT



I'M GOING TO LOOK INTO THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HER DEATH.

HER MURDER, YOU MEAN —

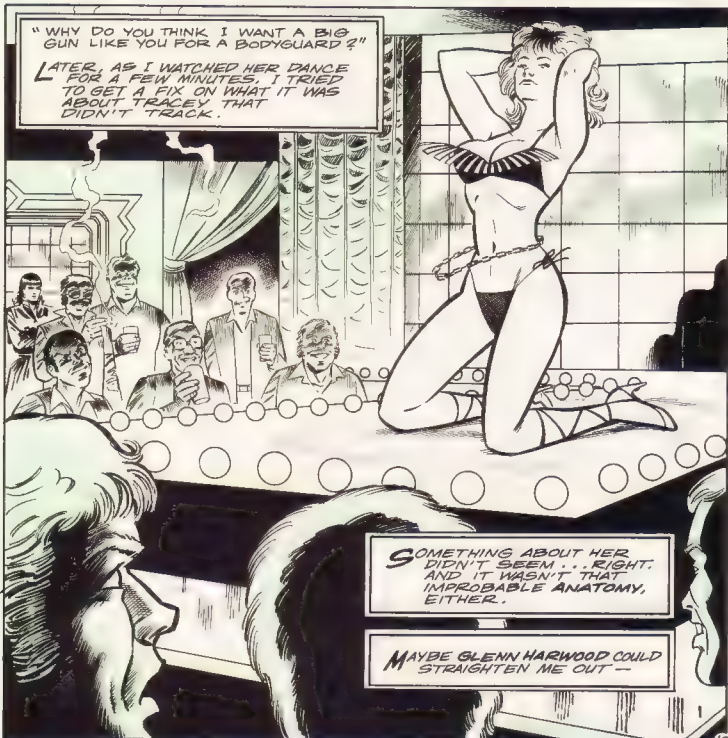


MURDER?

SURE. SHE WAS PLANNING TO DO THE SAME AS ME — BREAK OFF FROM MR. C., AND START HER OWN COMPANY.

"WHY DO YOU THINK I WANT A BIG GUN LIKE YOU FOR A BODYGUARD?"

LATER, AS I WATCHED HER DANCE FOR A FEW MINUTES, I TRIED TO GET A FIX ON WHAT IT WAS ABOUT TRACEY THAT DIDN'T TRACK.

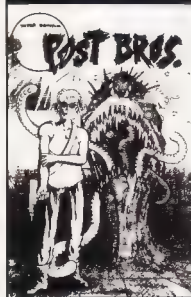
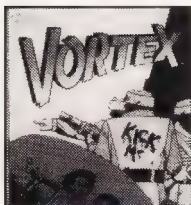


SOMETHING ABOUT HER DIDN'T SEEM ... RIGHT. AND IT WASN'T THAT IMPROBABLE ANATOMY, EITHER.

MAYBE GLENN HARWOOD COULD STRAIGHTEN ME OUT —

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BUY! BUY! BUY! Oh, please buy them, my mother's sick and she needs an operation, and my wife says she'll leave me if I turn out to be a failure, the bank's about to foreclose on my house, and I'm fired if this ad doesn't work! Oh, God... please!

Well, now that we've won you over to our side let's introduce you to these various comics you've agreed to purchase:

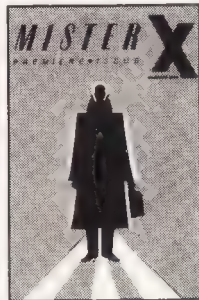
Mister X: The story of Radiant City (though corrupt and psychotic, what our future might have been) and the enigmatic characters who haunt it.

Stig's Inferno: Imagine dying and becoming ruler of Hell all before dinner. Who said Hell and damnation couldn't be fun?

Those Annoying Post Brothers: Continuing their adventures in Bugtown, Ron and Russ Post make a terrible mess wherever they go. It's Charles Manson's favorite comic. Need we say more?

Kelvin Mace: Our newest title. The tough guy's tough guy. He's one private detective who has no business being anyone's role model.

Vortex: Our flagship title continues to showcase both new and established talent in far out fantasy tales.



Max Allen Collins



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E.C. Meets The Underground!

For its dazzling debut, **BLAB!**, the E.C. collectors' magazine of fun-filled frenzy proudly presents a stellar-star lineup of contributors. Gilbert Shelton, Spain, Jaxon, Justin Green, Rick Griffin, Kim Deitch and Bill Griffith—plus nineteen more totally top-notch Underground cartoonists have provided brand new, in-depth, crazed commentary about E.C. comics. Read all about these artists' first encounters with E.C. comics, and learn of the electrifying effects E.C. had on their craft.

For this premiere issue of **BLAB!**, over one dozen of these madcap cartoonists have created wildly wacked-out E.C.-inspired illustrations that are guaranteed to blast your brain cells beyond the brink!

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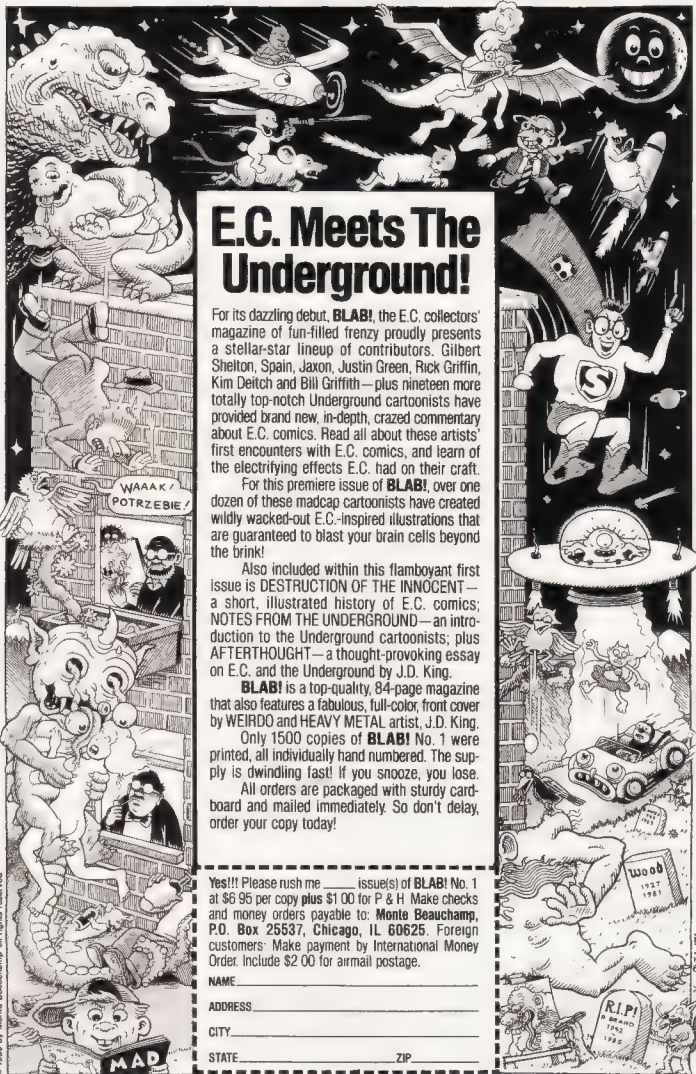
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MAX COLLINS and
TERRY BEATTY'S

Ms. TREE



Renegade

OCTOBER

MS. TREE #33

MS. TREE #33

written by: Max Collins

art by: Terry Beatty and Gary Kato

The death of a beautiful porn star and the search for a teen-age runaway sends Ms. Tree into the sleazy underground world of sex and violence for sale, an investigation complicated by the resurgence of her stormy relationship with social worker, Glenn Harwood.

MURDER #3

MURDER #3

art and stories by: Alex Toth, Allen Peterson, Rich Margopoulos, Dan Day and Steve Ditko.

edited by: Robin Snyder

This issue contains more shocking stories by both masters of the field and a newcomer to comics. Allen Peterson's "My Brother" by Steve Ditko is a tale of brother vs brother, and the winner will be judge, jury and executioner! Margopoulos and Day give twisted, dark beauty to Edgar Allan Poe's "Morella" and Allen Peterson's story of a condemned man's last minutes begins where most stories end. Cover painting by Alex Toth.



STRATA #4

STRATA #4

written by: Joe Judt

pencilled by: Ray Murtaugh

inked by: Jim Brozman

This issue is an all-swashbuckling adventure! Flambeau's commando team runs wild in the Iron City in a futile (but funny) attempt to avoid capture. Also, a new romance appears. This issue was originally scheduled to appear in July.

Also shipping this month: Strata free shop poster (see right)



ETERNITY SMITH #3

ETERNITY SMITH #3

In the third issue of Eternity Smith the adventure continues, and the mystery deepens!

This time, Eternity fights a duel to the death with the cyborg assassin TIK, plus, the secrets of Jason Thorne are revealed! Smith fights **alone** in his enemy's lair! All of this and more on sale in October!!



CASES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES #4

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art by: Dan Dan (cover by Dan and David Day)

story by : Arthur Conan Doyle

"The Adventure of the Six Napoleons"

What dark fascination does the six Napoleons possess, in order to drive a man to such utter madness that he would commit burglary and even murder in order to first obtain, then destroy, the likenesses of the great emperor?

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A ONE-ISSUE MICRO-SERIES — NEW FROM THE SOUTHERN KNIGHTS TEAM!

Pansafredicopacog — or **FRED** for short (which he is). He'll "acquire" anything from anywhen for you—IF the price is right.

BIANCA — Fred's partner. She's never met a lock she couldn't pick (except the ones on Fred's house).

Transformers? **Ha!** Go-Bots? **Doh!** The **FREDMOBILE** beats them all! It's a sleek, FTL car that can turn into ANYTHING (not to mention, travel through space and time)!



Fred and Bianca aren't without **enemies**, however—not one, not two, but **three** separate agencies want them!

The **INTERPOL** (Interstellar Police) agent wants them—regardless of consequences. Rambo would idolize this guy!

The **I.R.S.** (Interstellar Revenue Service) agent wants them—they haven't paid one thin credit of taxes on their ill-gotten gains!

The **REPO MAN** wants them—and the Fredmobile! It's been five years (relatively speaking) since Fred bought the car and he hasn't made a payment on time (which is ironic, when you think about it). In fact, Fred hasn't made a payment **at all!**

Now all of these "people" are converging here! Fred and Bianca have been hired to steal **Earth's greatest treasure**. Not the Mona Lisa! Not the Venus de Milo! Not even Christie Brinkley! What could it be?

Find out in —

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